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## Fund gets big boost from the House

**\$12M increase: Western U.S. House members fought for the hike to the PILT fund, which helps rural counties with federal lands pay for needed services**

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Salt Lake Tribune

WASHINGTON - Western U.S. House members succeeded in adding \$12 million to a historically shortchanged fund that helps rural counties with the cost of policing, fighting fires and keeping up federal lands.

Rep. Chris Cannon, R-Utah, said the House action would bring about \$1 million more to Utah counties, which last year received more than \$19 million from the program.

Known as Payment-In-Lieu-of-Taxes, or PILT, the funding is meant to compensate counties for property taxes they can't collect on federal lands within their borders.

Western counties with high percentages of federal land receive the bulk of the funds.

But for a quarter-century, the program has been shortchanged, with funding levels a cumulative \$1.1 billion lower than the target level over the last decade.

President Bush had proposed cutting another \$26 million from PILT this year, but House members restored those cuts, plus another \$3 million.

Thursday's agreement to add another \$12 million on top of that brings the House-approved funding to \$242 million, which is 80 percent of the full funding level, the highest level in the program's history.

"It's still not full funding and until we get full funding there is always an inequity," said Rep. Rob Bishop, R-Utah. "In the past, people back East have looked at this as Western welfare. . . . Our point was, if these are public lands, then all of us have to share in the cost of these lands."

The money was cut from the Interior Department's operating budget, which had been slated for a \$25 million increase.

Counties use the PILT money for search-and-rescue operations, firefighting and road maintenance.

"When you get one out-of-state resident to consume the entire search-and-rescue budget for Emery County for the entire year because they're out looking for a body . . . as sad as that is, it's simply unfair," Bishop said.

The House approved the Interior Department spending bill late Thursday. It still has to go to the Senate for consideration.

Sixty senators have signed a letter supporting \$235 million for PILT. Bishop said supporters of the program will fight hard to keep it in the bill.

"Shortchanging local communities by under-funding PILT is simply bad policy," said Rep. Barbara Cubin, R-Wyo. "Common sense dictates that fulfilling our obligations to local communities should take precedence over beefing up the Department of Interior's staff salaries and expense accounts."